

Mission Accomplished: Pluto Explored



At 7:50 a.m. EDT on July 14 NASA's New Horizons robotic probe to Pluto flies as close as it will come to the dwarf planet, coming within 7,800 miles of Pluto. (Considering that the spacecraft will travel 3 billion miles to reach Pluto, 7,800 miles is extremely close.)

A news release sent out by the USPS one week before the flyby (see the link at the end of this article) provides a fascinating connection with a 1991 stamp issue—the set of ten Space Exploration stamps, Sc. 2568-77 (photo above). As you can see, in each of the other nine stamps, the spacecraft involved with exploring that planet is shown. However, with Pluto, when the set was issued an attempt had not even been made to reach that distant planet.

It was not until January 19, 2006—some 9.5 years ago—the piano-sized New Horizons was launched on a journey that culminates with the orbit of Jupiter.



A NASA colorized photo of Pluto as taken by the New Horizons spacecraft on July 3, 2015 at a distance of 8.3 million miles.

The news release from the USPS relates how scientists were challenged by the “Pluto: Not Yet Explored” on that stamp, and when they finally succeeded in launching a ve-

hicle, they included on New Horizons one of those “Not Explored” stamps.

The USPS release included the comment, “...the stamp being onboard, will make some postal history too. Not only is it thought to be the first time that a U.S. postage stamp has been present for the event that effectively made its design outdated, but it is also the farthest that any stamp has ever traveled before.”

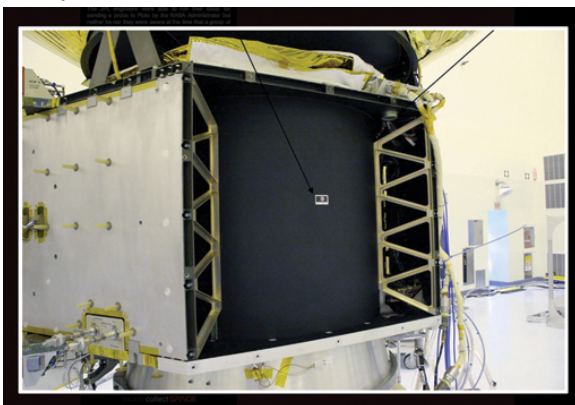
Ironically, on August 24, 2006, the International Astronomical Union voted for the new definition or a planet. Pluto did not meet that standard, and was downgraded to one of more than 40 dwarf planets, leaving the 1991 pane with eight planets, the moon—and one dwarf planet. Mary-Anne Penner, the U.S. Postal Service's acting director of stamp services, said in an interview with collectSPACE.com, “We are hoping that the New Horizons mission provides Pluto with a ‘stamp of approval,’ regardless of its status in the solar system.”



The Pluto stamp, Scott 2577



A NASA work showing the New Horizons spacecraft adjacent to the stamp.



The “Not Explored” stamp on the exploratory probe before launch.



A rendition, from our graphics manager, Marianne Cariddi, showing the stamp as it would appear if issued today.

For the full USPS release: <http://www.collectspace.com/news/news-070715a-newhorizons-pluto-explored-stamp.html>